

CYCLING

Tour cruising into town

Bicycle Races

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Planners announce Santa Cruz as one of 16 hosts for 2009 Tour of California

By I.A. STEWART

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

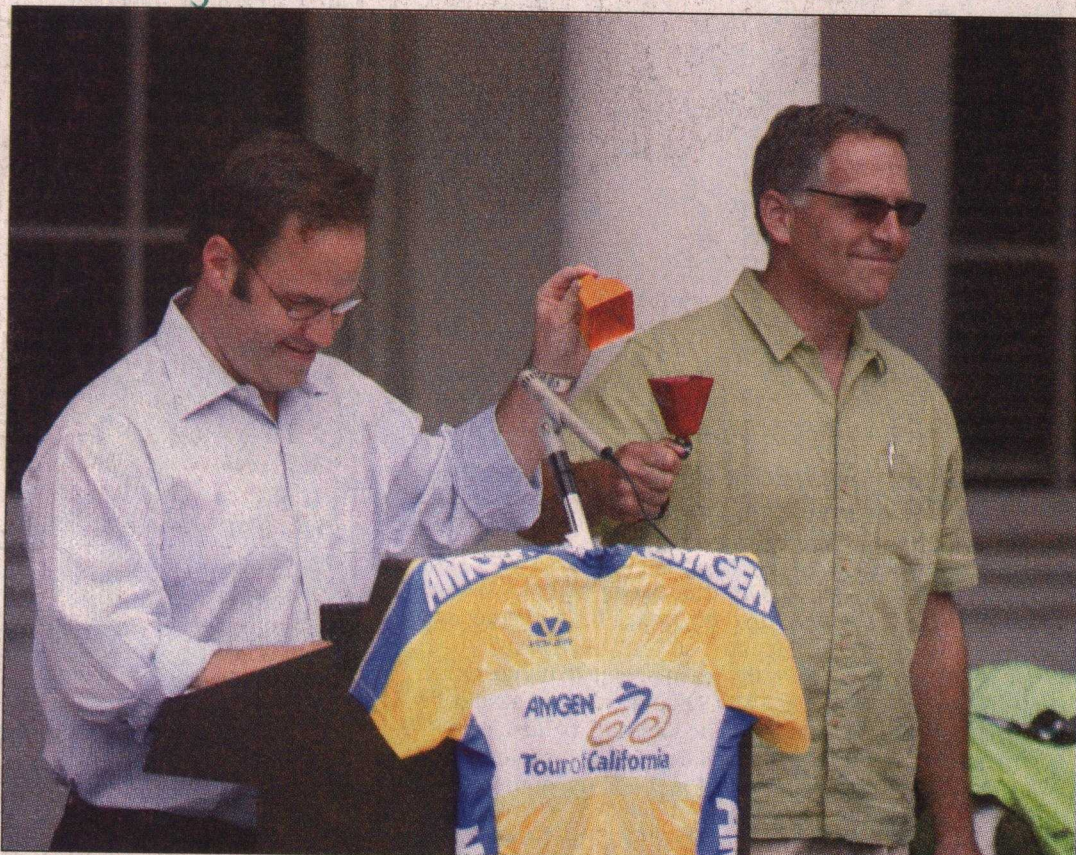
SANTA CRUZ – At long last, the City of Santa Cruz is officially on the cycling map.

Long a haven for outdoor-loving adventurers and already a hub of sorts for bicycle manufacturers, the town was introduced Wednesday as a host city for the 2009 Amgen Tour of California cycling race by Mayor Ryan Coonerty at a press conference outside City Hall.

“We have not only an active cycling community,” Coonerty said, “but we’re really a center for bicycle manufacturing and design around the world. So it’s a nice combination, because it really goes to one of our strengths.”

The Tour of California is the largest and perhaps the most prestigious road race in the United States. Last year it attracted 1.6 million spectators, and many of the top cyclists and teams across the world participate in the event. Levi Leipheimer, a former Tour de France and Olympic rider, won the race last year; while Fabian Cancellara, George Hincapie, and Christian Vande Velde all competed as well.

In addition to the exposure the Tour of California is likely to bring to Santa Cruz, it should also bring the city some cash. Last year, the race and its related activities generated an estimated \$100 million in revenue for the participating host cities. Coonerty said he expects “tens of thousands” of visitors to descend on Santa Cruz for the race.



I.A. Stewart/Register-Pajaronian

Santa Cruz Mayor Ryan Coonerty rings a cowbell Wednesday during a press conference to announce that Santa Cruz will play host to the third stage of the 2009 Tour of California cycling race.

2009 Amgen Tour of California

What

The largest cycling contest in the United States, in terms of attendance, recognition and money generated.

When

February 14-22, 2009

Where

16 cities across the state, including Santa Cruz, Davis, Sacramento, Paso Robles and Sausalito.

Big money

In each of the race's previous

three runnings, the event has generated over \$100 million in revenue for its host cities.

Big names

Levi Leipheimer, George Hincapie, Christian Vande Velde, Fabian Cancellara all rode in 2008.

SANTA CRUZ

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"People travel from all over the world to see this race, so we expect a large influx of people coming to our hotels and eating at our restaurants," Coonerty said. "And it's in mid-February, so that's generally not our busiest time of year, so that'll be a welcome addition to our economy."

Santa Cruz is set to be the ending point of the third stage of the 12-day race. The stage begins in Sausalito, north of San Francisco, and will, for the first time, take riders across the Golden Gate Bridge and down the coast to Santa Cruz. City and race officials Wednesday said they hadn't yet pinned down the exact route of the race, but it seemed likely riders would move south down Highway 1.

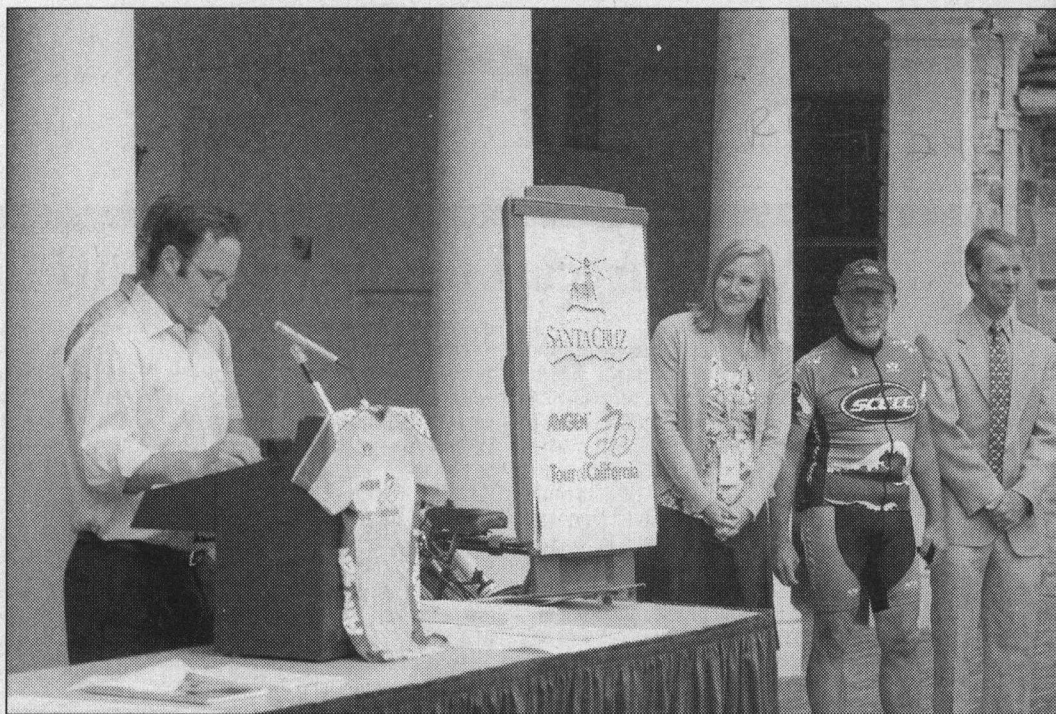
"That's our job over the next couple of months," Coonerty said. "Identify routes, sponsors, and everything else."

Watsonville resident and UCSC graduate Ben Jacques-Maynes has competed in the Tour of California the past three years with Team Bissell and was on-hand Wednesday at the press conference.

"It's a big positive for Santa Cruz cycling, obviously," Jacques-Maynes said. The county in general is going to be on the screen, on the map for international cycling."

The Tour is expanding for 2009 to include 16 host cities, eight of which are hosting the race for the first time. Coonerty said a committee from Santa Cruz has been trying for three years to secure a spot in the race, but only now got the green light.

The race begins in Sacra-



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Santa Cruz Mayor Ryan Coonerty (from left) addresses a crowd while Tina Shull, a City of Santa Cruz staff member, Bart Coddington, president of the Santa Cruz County Cycling Club, and Jim Gentes, founder of the Giro cycling equipment company, look on.

mento, and moves toward the coast through Davis to Santa Rosa. The third stage moves south to Santa Cruz, at which point riders begin stage four in San Jose and ride to Modesto. Stage five goes from Merced down to Clovis; then from Visalia to Paso Robles. Other stops include Solvang, Santa Clarita, Pasadena, Escondido and finally, Rancho Bernardo.

In the past, Santa Cruz had tried to link with San Jose to either co-host a stage or include some sort of time trial here, but failed. Coonerty credited a newfound level of enthusiasm within the city as one of the reasons the city was granted the bid. Others said Santa Cruz was simply a natural fit, and that it was just a matter of time before race organizers figured it out.

"We have the ocean and the

mountains," said Jim Gentes, one of the race directors for the Santa Cruz stage and also the founder of Santa Cruz-based cycling-accessory manufacturer Giro. "We have the opportunity to go into the redwoods, and there's some challenging climbs we have there, and then the beauty of the beach. Really, it's why we live here."

Jacques-Maynes said he thinks Santa Cruz will do the Tour proud.

"We've got it," he said. "Santa Cruz has needed a tour stage ever since they started it. Having seen what they're looking for in past additions to the tour, I know that we can provide a top-notch race course. It's a huge cycling community here. If you've seen the group ride roll out, you can have 100 hardcore athletic types, and they range all over the county, down

into Watsonville, south to Corralitos. The roads here are great, and they attract those athletic types."

Bart Coddington, president of the Santa Cruz County Cycling Club, was enthusiastic about the news of the race coming to the coast.

"It means the rest of the world gets to see what we already know," Coddington said. "That Santa Cruz County is a fantastic cycling county, and particularly Pajaro Valley is a great area. Unfortunately, the race isn't going to go through the Pajaro Valley, but people will now learn more about Santa Cruz county, and what a great cycling county it is, and that's going to be good for the economy in the long term."

The race runs Feb. 14-22. For further information, visit www.amgentourofcalifornia.com.